Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2010/07/23 : CIA-RDP90-00552R000303160003-7

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-31

WASHINGTON POST
3 November 1983

Marine Commandant Says Beirut Bombing Toll Could Reach 239

By Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Marine Corps commandant, Gen. P.X. Kelley, said yesterday that the death toll in the terrorist bomb attack on Marine headquarters in Beirut 11 days ago could reach 239 if those still missing are eventually counted as dead.

Yesterday, the Defense Department raised the official count of known dead from 230 to 234.

Kelley appeared before the House Armed Services Committee for a third straight day of testimony about the adequacy of Marine security and intelligence before the attack and the beefed-up defensive measures that have been taken since.

His nerves perhaps frayed by the string of appearances, Kelley—who has been guarded by plainclothes security men on every visit to Capitol Hill—snapped back at times when members of the House panel suggested in their questions that the Marines and Lebanese might have been more alert to the threat.

For both Kelley and the legislators, the hearings have been a sensitive and delicate matter.

On the one hand, the Marine Corps as an institution and Kelley as its new leader have extraordinary support on Capitol Hill. Lawmakers, no matter what their views on the tragedy, make very clear they respect the valor of the Marines in Lebanon and the fact that they have been placed in a tough situation by politicians and diplomats.

Yet it is also clear that not everybody accepts Kelley's emphatic assertion that, despite the car-bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April and the general turmoil in the area, "no one anticipated" that the terrorist would use a five-ton truck instead of a car and would come crashing through Marine defenses at dawn on a suicide mission.

The first direct challenge to Kelley came late Monday before the Senate Armed Services Committee when Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Maine) said the situation gave "new meaning to the words 'at dawn we slept,'" an allusion to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"The fact that no one anticipated a terrorist attack of this magnitude and precision, I think is going to ring somewhat hollow to the parents of dead Marines because there has been ample precedent," Cohen said, referring to the widespread use of car bombs.

"I don't know that it [took] a visionary to foresee that a truck bomb might be used to take down an even more formidable structure" such as the Marine headquarters in comparison with the embassy, Cohen said.

Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.) asked: "Have we always attempted to defend against future threats based on precedents from the past? Are we still operating under the delusion that our enemies will not be imaginative and inventive?"

Yesterday, Rep. Ken Kramer (R-Colo.), said after listening to Kelley, "I personally believe we should have anticipated an incident of this type."

When Rep. John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) asked Kelley why Lebanese soldiers manning checkpoints on main highways leading to the nearby airport did not hold up traffic to check vehicles more closely for explosives, even if it meant hours of stalled traffic, Kelley shot back: "Let's use good judgment about this, Mr. Kasich, and not get emotional for the TV cameras."

When Rep. Richard B. Ray (D-Ga.) asked Kelley why no threat had been sensed from the direction of attack, surmising that the driver had taken a minute or so to increase his speed in an adjoining parking lot, Kelley answered: "You've got a wilder imagination . . . and better crystal ball . . . than I do, congressman."

Rep. Larry J. Hopkins (R-Ky.) said that on Oct. 25, a Marine Corps general briefing congressmen about to leave for Beirut told them the sentries around the compound had their weapons loaded before the attack. That has since been contradicted. Although Kelley said it was his "professional judgment" that small-arms fire could not have stopped the speeding truck, Hopkins said the only sure thing is that "an empty M16 will not stop anything."

At another point, Kelley asked to be allowed "one moment of emotion" and said that while "we are wondering about" whether guns were loaded or the airport should be closed, "nobody is addressing the root cause, terrorism, and that is very frustrating. I want the perpetrators and I want them brought to justice. We've got to get to the disease."

He said that if this country backs away from the terrorist challenge, "I promise you the United States will be victimized by every kook terrorist, subversive and nation supporting terrorism all over the world."

The hearings have also surfaced what appears to be a battle between the Marine Corps and some people within the intelligence community.

Kelley said yesterday "no one anticipated this kind of an attack from a truck. In every indication from the intelligence community that had any specificity to it—and I am not talking about the vague and general statements that they make and can then hide behind—the word used was car bomb and not truck."

Kelley has said repeatedly that there were numerous but vague warnings of terrorist threats "but not a shred" of hard intelligence.

Yesterday, The New York Times reported that three days before the

CONTINUED

Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2010/07/23 : CIA-RDP90-00552R000303160003-7